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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

30 September 1986

SRI LANKA: Will Jayewardene Again Seek US Arms? ☐

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Summary

Sri Lankan President Jayewardene's determination to seek a military solution to the Tamil insurgency, if the current peace talks do not end the fighting, will probably lead him to seek more military assistance, including arms from the United States. He is likely to portray a partial agreement resulting from the current round of talks as meeting US and Indian desires for a peaceful settlement, even though the most active group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, is unlikely to agree to quit fighting. Increased US military support would heighten the terrorist risk to Americans both in and outside Sri Lanka. It would also complicate Washington's relations with New Delhi. US failure to support Jayewardene, however, is likely to erode Washington's leverage in Colombo and could be read in Pakistan and other regional states as demonstrating US unreliability. ☐

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This memorandum was prepared by ☐  
Subcontinent Branch, South Asia Division, of the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Information as of 30 September 1986 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, South Asian Division, NESA, ☐

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Background

Sri Lanka's three-year-old Tamil insurgency is growing stronger, with the government gradually losing control of more territory in the North and East. [redacted] about 7,000 insurgent fighters are active on the island and another 3,000 are in training camps in southern India; this compares with a total of only about 1,000 insurgents three years ago. We estimate about 10,000 additional Tamils worldwide support the insurgents, providing money, materiel, and safe houses. The main insurgent groups, especially the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), are moving their support and training operations into the territory they are consolidating in Sri Lanka's Northern Province. They also are forging links with international arms marketeers and radical groups [redacted]

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Jayewardene is embarked on a two-track policy of military action and negotiations. In May the military launched a series of attacks against insurgent positions in the North to clear roads and relieve pressure on government garrisons. The effort failed, however, in the face of heavy insurgent resistance and since that time government troops have been mostly on the defensive. [redacted]

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At least temporarily stymied on the military front, Jayewardene recently has put forward new peace proposals to resolve the conflict. He has offered to grant considerable power to provincial councils that would control police and local security units. In the north, and possibly the east, these councils would be controlled by Tamils. Jayewardene, however, has held firm against the principal Tamil demand to link the north and east into one Tamil-run province. [redacted]

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Diplomats close to the negotiations have mixed views on whether an agreement can be reached. The US Embassy in New Delhi reports that Indian officials are upbeat over the progress made on Jayewardene's proposals in his recent discussions with Tamil moderates. The Indian High Commissioner in Colombo, however, recently indicated he was pessimistic a settlement could be reached. The US Embassy in Colombo reports that, although agreement has been reached on many secondary issues, negotiations remain stuck over Tamil demands for merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the degree of autonomy to be turned over to provincial governments. [redacted]

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In our judgment, Jayewardene will only be able to reach a settlement with moderate Tamils and some of the insurgents. Tamil hardliners, especially the LTTE, have opposed his proposals as being far short of their demands for independence. These groups have promised publicly to torpedo any agreement that is reached between Colombo and Tamil moderates. US Embassy

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reporting indicates conservative Sinhalese elements also do not favor proposals that take significant power away from the Sinhalese dominated central government, a constraint limiting Jayewardene's negotiating position in the talks. Given the influence of both Sinhalese and Tamil hardliners, it is possible that no agreement will be reached, with the talks winding down--or dragging on--with no resolution. [ ]

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#### Colombo's Search for US Support

In either case--a partial settlement or no settlement at all--Jayewardene is likely to again approach the United States, and other suppliers, for arms and military equipment. We believe Jayewardene will try to convince Washington either that he needs arms to enforce a partial peace agreement or that he gave negotiations his best shot and now he deserves the means to enforce a military solution. [ ]

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In our judgment, Jayewardene initially will ask for much, but will scale down his requests at each rebuff from Washington.

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-- He may well renew his recently turned down request for AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunships and, failing that, request transport helicopters. [ ]

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[ ] the government has been favorably impressed with the performance in counterinsurgency operations of its US-designed Bell helicopters supplied by Singapore.

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-- We believe Colombo will ask for gunboats. [ ]

[ ] Sri Lankan military authorities are dissatisfied with the performance of their naval cordon in the Palk Strait. They already have begun to acquire more patrol craft from South Korea.

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-- [ ] the Army is considering procuring an array of light armored vehicles and is interested in the US-made Cadillac-Gage series.

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-- Colombo likely will ask for US small arms and ammunition. [ ]

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Sri Lanka is likely to request non-lethal equipment to support weapons already in its inventory. Colombo believes the insurgents have surface-to-air missiles, and US Embassy reporting indicates Jayewardene is seeking defensive and countermeasure systems--engine exhaust baffles, flares, and chaff--to protect Sri Lanka's helicopters. [ ] Colombo is considering buying ship-borne radar and surveillance equipment to improve its abilities to interdict insurgent naval traffic; we believe it would be interested in US models. We believe Colombo also may seek communications gear to better coordinate military operations. [ ]

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We believe that Colombo will push heavily for military training. It will probably request more student billets under the IMET program, most likely in counterinsurgency-related courses such as Ranger and Special Forces schools, and in hardware-related courses like helicopter maintenance. Jayewardene is unlikely to ask for a US training team to be sent to Sri Lanka because such a high-profile American presence would invite criticism from his political opposition. [ ]

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#### Dangers for the United States

In our judgment, increased US military support to Colombo likely will fuel existing anti-American attitudes among the insurgents, putting US personnel and facilities there at risk of terrorist attack. American tourists, the Embassy in Colombo, periodic naval visits, and the proposed Voice of America transmitter in the island's North Western Province could provide attractive targets. Except for the brief kidnapping of an American couple by insurgents in 1984, Tamils so far have refrained from attacking US targets. The insurgents have recently killed several Europeans working in Sri Lanka. They have publicly threatened multi-national corporations operating in Sri Lanka and attacked a joint Sri Lankan-Japanese cement factory last spring. [ ]

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We also believe that the insurgents could pose a credible terrorist threat to US personnel and facilities outside Sri Lanka. [ ] the LTTE has maintained a terrorist cell in West Germany since 1984, which we believe could be used to attack US military personnel and installations in that country. [ ] Tamil insurgents last winter planned but failed to execute an attack against a helicopter firm in Singapore that supplies the Sri Lankan government. The insurgents' international network of drug smugglers in Europe and the Middle East and their offices in West Germany, Britain, Switzerland, Canada, and Bahrain give them the wherewithal for widespread terrorist activities. [ ]

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We believe that more US military aid to Sri Lanka would encourage the insurgents to increase their own weaponry. If they cannot acquire sufficient numbers or types of arms in international arms markets to match those of the beefed-up security forces, we believe the insurgents may turn to radical groups, such as the PLO, with whom they already have ties, or even to radical governments--Hanoi, Pyongyang, Tripoli, or Moscow--for arms. [redacted] believes the insurgents already receive arms from North Korea and Vietnam. [redacted]

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Lack of a US response to a Sri Lankan request for aid would have its own costs. Failure to respond to Colombo's request for support could leave the United States with little leverage with Jayewardene as well as with any more hardline Sinhalese government that might replace him. A US rebuff also is likely to result in an increase in purchases by West Europe, China, and Israel--all of whom already supply Sri Lanka's military. Moreover, a cold shoulder from Washington may be read in other regional capitals, such as Islamabad, as exhibiting US unreliability. [redacted]

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### India's Position

Increased US military support to Colombo could be a major irritant in Indo-US relations. India is sensitive to any outside power supplying arms to Sri Lanka, which New Delhi regards as in its sphere of influence. New Delhi would probably also view US support to Sri Lanka as an attempt to expand the US military presence in the Indian Ocean. US Embassy reporting indicates New Delhi does not consider present levels of US military support to Colombo troublesome, but we believe that, in the absence of at least a partial settlement, the Indians will see an increase as a challenge to their regional leadership. [redacted]

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If the Tamil militants reject an Indian backed peace offer, New Delhi might well try to cut off insurgent arms flows. In such a scenario the Indians might not object to a modest increase in US aid, but would remain deeply suspicious of US objectives. [redacted]

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### Possible Ways to Help

US training [redacted] for Sri Lanka's security forces probably would provoke the least foreign criticism and would be very useful to Colombo. Such training could include courses in airport security and explosive ordnance disposal as well as counterinsurgency tactics. [redacted]

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[redacted] New Delhi might tolerate such low profile support since it has responded favorably to recent US counterterrorism and antinarcotics initiatives and accepted US assistance in upgrading Indian airport security. Still, Indian tolerance likely would evaporate quickly if New Delhi believed US support undercut its influence over either Jayawardene or the guerrillas. [redacted]

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## ANNEX

The Insurgents' Arsenal and Support Structure

The insurgents' arsenal is growing in numbers to match their swelling ranks and increasing in sophistication. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] World War II-era Japanese rifles and home-made booby traps are being replaced by AK-47s, M-16s, and rocket-propelled grenades. Colombo has claimed the insurgents recently have acquired SAM-7s, but we have seen no conclusive evidence of their deployment or use. Their presence, however, would significantly increase the insurgents' ability to combat Colombo's attack planes and armed helicopters. [REDACTED]

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